

# The Woman at the Well

Life is beautiful, but it's also messy. Some people can be a blessing, while others a curse. One person feels like they're living a dream, while another a nightmare. One person can be on the right path, while the other is lost in the dessert. One man can be totally satisfied, while a woman is completely empty. John 4: You've got to point out the pain in order to reveal their need and futile behaviors. Why has she had so many husbands? Why put herself through so much shame?

John 4:1-26

1 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John 2 (although Jesus Himself did not baptize, but only His disciples), 3 He left Judea and departed again for Galilee. 4 And He had to pass through Samaria. 5 So He came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as He was from His journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. 7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." 8 (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

## - Setting and Background

### - Traveling to Galilee

- At this point, John the Baptist had been imprisoned. Jesus had taught in the southern portion of Judea, while John covered the mid-to north portion of the district. Jesus was closely related to John, not just because He's kin, but because they shared a message and were baptizing (though Jesus didn't specifically do that, and that could be because of the attention it brought to Himself and to keep that from being the main focus of one's baptism - "who" baptized who such as 1 Corinthians 1:13-14). This is a move that made sense for Jesus at that time. Going North would be safe for him.

### - Samaria

- Jesus, according to Luke, travels north "in the power of the Spirit to Galilee" (Luke 4:14), but He passes through Samaria.
- Samaria - a people both hated by Gentiles and Jews. Why? Because they didn't perfectly fit in either category.
  - **2 Kings 17:24-31:** The King of Assyria, after the fall of Israel, placed foreigners in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel. However, God was punishing them for not "following the law of the God of the land". They did not fear God. So, the King was advised to send a priest back to Samaria to teach the people how they should fear the Lord. However, they tried to straddle the fence by serving their gods and Jehovah at the same time. At first glance, it may seem as though no Jew was left in Samaria (the capital of Israel), but we clearly see going forward in the text, a Jewish remnant left behind in Samaria that did not go into captivity. The "cream of the crop" were taken by the Assyrians, the others were killed, while others were left in the land. We read about, for example, those from the Northern Tribes during the days of Hezekiah (the King of Judah mentioned in the next chapter). What's the point? Well, these Jews married the foreigners now dwelling in Samaria. The result was a mixed race, the Samaritans, that were never totally accepted by Jew or Gentile. This was extremely offensive to Jews, and even Orthodox Jews today take great offense to marrying outsiders. "In a strict Jewish household even to this day if a son or a daughter marries a Gentile, his or her funeral service is carried out. Such a person is dead in the eyes of orthodox Judaism. (Barclay)"

- They had their own Pentateuch (claiming their roll was the only authentic one which had subtle differences in text and their 10 commandments were worded differently and included an 11th commandment that Gerizim be established), but they mainly focused those books alone.
- While the temple in Jerusalem was the worship center for Judaism, Mount Gerizim housed the temple for Samaritans.

- **Women and Men.**

- So, this doesn't sound strange to an American citizen in 2022, but it was a different story 2,000 years ago. Men didn't talk to women in private. "The strict Rabbis forbade a Rabbi to greet a woman in public. A Rabbi might not even speak to his own wife or daughter or sister in public. There were even Pharisees who were called "the bruised and bleeding Pharisees" because they shut their eyes when they saw a woman on the street and so walked into walls and houses!" (Barclay).
- Jesus talked with her. That alone stands out. We can't be so comfortable in our bubbles . . . they need to be popped. So many excuses. They won't listen. They think I'm trying to take advantage. Their too much in the world and won't make the change or their upbringing was so messed up it can't (practically) be fixed. We live in a time when we're so divided (politically), that we don't see the point anymore. We talk to those who make us comfortable in general. However, we've done this in religion as well. We talk to those who agree with us and figure, "What's the use" with those who don't.
- Imagine the power behind Jesus' words. Picture the scene in your head and appreciate their culture. Jesus shows Himself, right off the bat, to be different. Not harsh. But breaking the rules in a lovely way. Knowing Him, I don't hear a harsh tone. In fact, I'm sure He had a wonderful demeanor about Himself. After all, what's His goal? Is this really going to be about water? Jesus' words, right off the bat are refreshing like cool water on a hot summer's day, because they're refreshing. It's not the same old, same old. How are your words to other?

- **What's the point in going through all of this?**

- Who doesn't want to know, more accurately, the setting and "behind the scene" details that bring life to a text? But also, we need see the relevance: everyone has a story. Everyone has a background. Everyone has a culture - and these shape us without us really thinking about it. There's a context that you don't even know you're living and when someone walks into your bubble, they've walked into your world, bringing their own point of view and beliefs into the discussion. It's good to be mindful and aware, so we can handle ourselves appropriately, be patient and humble, while seeking to help. You can think all day long that your way of thinking and living is right (and who knows, it may be in many ways), but that won't make those you encounter see or understand or interpret life the way you do.
- God brings people together. **He's not a puppet master, rather a providential God.** Just as Jesus went north by the power of the Spirit, so I believe God is still guiding steps and leading people in the right direction. But you've got to be willing to follow God's will. You've got to have the right spirit about you. There are several explanations given as to why Jesus traveled through Samaria. I've got a simple one: maybe He knew there was work to be done in unexpected places? What pulls you?

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." 11 The woman said to Him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are You greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

- **Water.**

- It's seen everywhere in the Bible. We've already seen in mentioned in John 1 (baptism), 2 (water to win), 3 (born of water and spirit) and now here. This scene is familiar in a way, because it holds a pattern seen in the previous chapter. Jesus makes a statement they both take literal. Jesus gives further instruction and they're still confused. Jesus then goes in to further instruct and calls them to action.
- We're not talking about water, are we. There are numerous passages that equate water as something that comes from God, given to His people. There are many passages that would make the point, but these passages should be sufficient.
  - **Jeremiah 2:13** For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.
  - **Isaiah 12:3** With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.
  - **Isaiah 55:1-3** "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to Me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, My steadfast, sure love for David."
- Like the bread discussed in chapter 6, this water is for everyone and will not leave you wanting. Your thirst will be quenched. But, she's not getting it yet. Does Jesus know of another source? Is there a flowing spring nearby? That would be preferred over old, standing water.

- **Need.**

- It's not that Jesus wasn't thirsty. We all get thirsty. But that's not the need He's talking about. JESUS STARTS WHERE THEY HAVE COMMON GROUND AND THEN MAKES APPLICATION. Everyone has eternity in their hearts. It is my belief that people, without knowing God and having this water, are spiritually parched. They may not know what the need is . . . they may not be able to articulate what's going on, but there's something missing. It's our responsibility to help others see what this is all about, but we've got to remember something: a parched land can't bear fruit for anyone. A dehydrated soul can't instruct another dehydrated soul. If you've barely got life in you, how can you save another?

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 17 The woman answered Him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but You say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things." 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

- **Sin.**

- It's a problem. Some say there's too much speculation about her marital status. Fair enough, but I doubt all five husbands died prematurely. What's more probable? We're dealing with a woman who's going through men. Not saying she couldn't have been put away for other reasons - there were Jews that would put away their wives for burning their meals (yeah, really). But, there's a good chance she's going through men. There's a good chance she's struggling with things in her life. Why do men go through so many women? Why do women go through so many men? What are we seeking? Who do we think can fill the hole? What brings someone validation and security? Many believe that considering the time of day (12pm), it indicates she was purposely alone. We're told that women would go together, either in the morning or evening, to get water. She's here alone. Coincidence? Maybe she's been shamed?

- Running from awkward conversations. How many of you would ask Jesus' question? Would you prefer to dodge it all together? Leave it to someone else? We can't do that either. People need to see the problem in their life. They need to confront sin. Our biggest problem is that majority run from reality. They don't like to hear it and most don't want to say it.
- Notice the wisdom behind Jesus' question. Jesus rebuked Nicodemus more clearly, "You're a teacher, but you don't get what I'm saying?". He addressed the woman, but it was a bit more subtle. **His question made a statement.** Know your audience and be fair.

#### - **Dodging.**

- It could be that she wasn't dodging. Perhaps she's thinking, "Okay, He's the real deal. I've sinned and need to sacrifice to God. So, which mountain should I head to, Gerizim or Jerusalem." That could be it, but this feels like a dodge. It's a change of subject. You ever run into this? You ever do it?
- Jesus' response needs to be considered. We also don't have to harp on the sin alone - know your audience. You may need to hit the sin and sit on it for some people, because they're not lacking knowledge, but acting stubborn. However, others may be in sin, but ignorantly. They may need more encouragement about who God is and how's He's trying to help them. One person's hurdle may not be giving up the sin, rather understanding who God is and the significance of Jesus as Lord. That's a game changer. Babes will receive Jesus - it's the wise who don't understand or accept what Jesus had to say. We can speak truth (Jesus clears up the dispute), but He doesn't want her to miss the bigger picture. WE need to have wisdom with others: what's the main goal? **Is what you're WANTING to talk about what they NEED?** Sometimes we need to get beyond the controversy to reach the goal.

#### - **The Messiah.**

- We also, as those spreading the new, have a need to know our audience while at the same time see a common denominator. Nicodemus was a mature, respected, sophisticated, educated, leader and teacher of Israel. He would have been considered righteous among his peers. The woman was different. She's a sinful, uneducated, Samaritan . . . woman. Yet, both needed living water. Again, sometimes we can get into a little more meat with one individual depending on their intelligence and/or knowledge of the word. Jesus speaks very clearly with the woman. In fact, He wouldn't be that clear for another two years. But we need to see that everyone needs Him and we have the privilege of talking about Jesus. You know why? Because right now you're comparing yourself to Jesus, that is, learning from Him regarding our hearts and approach to those in the darkness. But in reality, we need to see ourselves as the woman before we ever relate to Jesus. We've all met Jesus as the well, brethren.